

War Dance: Plains Indian Musical Performance

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minded citizens in Iowa and other states have made great progress in *preserving* our heritage. Now the challenge before us is to get a wide range of citizens—students and policy makers, in particular—to *use* what we have preserved. The answers to that challenge will not be found in books like this one, but in a concerted effort to raise public consciousness about the value of the past. It is time for us to put down the books and get to work.

War Dance: Plains Indian Musical Performance, by William K. Powers. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990. xx, 199 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY THOMAS VENNUM, JR., SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

After forty years of fieldwork and numerous publications on the music and dance of Plains Indian peoples, William K. Powers is an established authority on the subject. His most recent book, *War Dance*, however, is a major disappointment. Instead of synthesizing his vast experience with the material to provide fresh insights and make a major contribution to the ethnomusicological literature, he has opted instead to string together in fairly disjointed fashion a miscellany of his previous essays, some of them more than two decades old.

The book is divided into two parts. An anecdotal, autobiographical introduction to Powers's early career leads into part one, "Plains Indian Music and Dance," whose seven chapters make up the essence of the book. In them he defines "powwow" and "War dance," contrasts musical-cultural traits of the northern (Dakotan) and southern (Oklahoman) plains, and considers matters of diffusion. His main contribution to *War Dance*, the excellent and previously unpublished chapter, "Pan-Indianism Reconsidered," unfortunately has little to do with the purported topic of the book. The four final chapters (part two, "Plains Music in Review") represent little more than an appendix, consisting of slightly reworked *Ethnomusicology* reviews of recordings, many of them out of print and some containing song genres (peyote music, Christian hymnody) having nothing to do with Powers's central theme.

War Dance is richly illustrated with twenty historical and contemporary photographs. However, their subject matter, layout, and the general lack of commentary on them suggest that they are mere fillers. Nowhere are they referred to in the text, nor are they used to illustrate the discussion. For example, the photograph of an informal Rabbit dance from about 1930 on the Pine Ridge Reservation appears on page 31, while Powers describes the dance on page 79. Similarly, the

photograph of a victory celebration after World War II on page 160 might well have served the author's point on page 50 that military service in this century helped to strengthen Indian values. The illustrations mostly show dancers in action or resting; in only one (59) are the singers seen with any clarity.

It is not at all clear what the intended audience of this work is. Certainly the book contributes nothing to ethnomusicology. Since there is no comparable introduction to Plains music for the layperson, one might recommend it for that audience were the work not so marred by redundancies, outdated information, and even contradictions and constant references to other publications for information.

There is also much to suggest that Powers has simply not kept up with his field. As the authoritative work on the Great Basin Sun Dance, for instance, he cites a 1915 publication by Robert Lowie, failing to note Joseph G. Jorgenson's definitive *The Sun Dance Religion* (1972). His discography on page 178 includes nothing released since 1978, and his illustrations are credited to the Smithsonian's "Bureau of American Ethnology Collection," a form of reference that was replaced in the late 1960s by the designation "National Anthropological Archives." Nor has he remembered his history. Regarding dancers' blowing on whistles to prolong a song, he cites a 1964 personal communication from James Howard, saying the practice was popular in the early 1960s, whereas Frances Densmore documented it a half-century earlier in *Teton Sioux Music* (1918, p. 471).

The book is replete with contradictions. Vocal typologies A and B given on page 26 are reversed on page 119. On page 139 Powers says he first met William Horncloud in 1948; on page 151 he says it was 1949. Dance ethnographers will wince at his assertion that "music is more flexible, more open to improvisation, elaboration, and individual style than dance" (49), a statement weakened by his own observation that a good Indian dancer is judged by "his ability to combine an accepted style with his personal attitude, which ultimately becomes *his* style, *his* individuality" (71).

Iowa historians will find little specific to the area, although Powers concludes the book with his visit to Tama in 1989, where he was encouraged to find in such a small community seven active Mesquakie drums (singing groups) performing—an example of the continued vitality of plains music and dance. Although he does not categorize the Mesquakie in terms of vocal or dance styles, he would clearly (and correctly) place them in the northern plains subdivision of his study, as reflecting more the Grass Dance than Oklahoman traits. Little attention has been paid to Mesquakie music, although the linguist Truman Michelson recorded a large number of their tradi-

tional songs about 1912. A comparison with contemporary Indian music in Iowa would be useful in future studies of plains diffusion and cultural continuity, such as Powers has attempted here, albeit unsuccessfully.

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